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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRATISLAVA 000051

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SUBJECT: SLOVAKIA POLITICAL ROUNDUP JANUARY 20, 2006

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Classified By: DCM Lawrence R. Silverman for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

WORST AIR CRASH IN SLOVAK HISTORY LEAVES 42 DEAD

11. (U) Only one passenger out of 43 survived when a Slovak Air Force An-24 crashed January 19 into the side of a snow-covered mountain in northeastern Hungary, three kilometers from the Slovak border. The flight was returning from Kosovo with 28 members of Slovakia's KFOR peacekeeping contingent, as well as seven crewmembers and eight uniformed members of the General Staff. As of January 20, all the bodies of the soldiers had been recovered and the cause of the accident was still unknown. A second flight that had left Kosovo shortly after the first arrived safely with the lost soldiers' luggage and equipment.

12. (C) The flight was piloted by Colonel Miroslav Novak, Commander of the Malacky Air base and a respected reformer within the military. The Slovak public is in shock, and a National Day of Mourning has been set for January 23. We note that the loss of the commanders -- as well as the aircraft -- is a huge blow to the Slovak armed forces.

MINISTER OF JUSTICE "TIRED," WON'T SEEK CABINET POST AGAIN

13. (C) Minister of Justice Daniel Lipsic told Ambassador during a private dinner that his time in the cabinet has left him "tired." While he will run on the candidate list of Christian Democrat party KDH, he will not seek a ministry position again. Lipsic, who greatly admires former Attorney General John Ashcroft, said he understands "why Ashcroft left early." Lipsic is most proud of his accomplishments combating corruption and organized crime. He said that no government will ever be free of corruption, but he believes Slovakia has made more progress in this area than any other central European country. While he doesn't know "what's next" for him after the national elections in September, he has considered becoming a prosecutor in Slovakia's special corruption court, which he created.

13. (C) Lipsic told the Ambassador there is an agreement between the coalition partners that if any of the parties does significantly better than the others in the national elections, that party will pick the prime minister. If KDH -- which performed better than other coalition parties in November's regional elections-- should do as well again, Lipsic said that current Chairman of Parliament Pavol Hrusovsky would "absolutely" want to become PM. Lipsic said a government with HZDS and KDH was out of the question, even if former PM Vladimir Meciar were not seeking a leadership position, because "HZDS is Meciar." Lipsic said that he personally has a good working relationship with the opposition Smer party, which has been supportive of Lipsic's anti-corruption efforts and legislation. An avid diver and photographer, Lipsic told the Ambassador that while he prefers to dive in Croatia, he learned -- and continues to sing the praises of -- diving in Slovakia's mountain lakes.

SECURITY STRATEGY MAY INSULATE COALITION IN ELECTIONS

14. (C) State Secretary (Deputy Foreign Minister) Magda Vasaryova (SDKU) opened a January 13 meeting by reassuring us that SDKU would not drag foreign policy into this year's national elections. She told us SDKU is disappointed that, "since Gerhardt Schroeder, it has become fashionable to be anti-American during domestic elections." Vasaryova cautioned that opposition parties -- particularly Smer -- could be tempted to open topics such as Iraq and Slovak support for U.S. policy, but that SDKU was prepared. Vasaryova noted that the Security Strategy passed by the parliament last year (ref B) specifically codified a "special relationship" between the U.S. and Slovakia, to which the opposition did not object. SDKU is quite ready to remind the public of this fact in the event of America-bashing during the election.

400 ELECTION OBSERVERS TO UKRAINE

15. (C) Slovak NGO activist Peter Novotny -- who also serves as co-head of the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations (ENEMO) told us January 11 that ENEMO is preparing to deploy 400 election observers to Ukraine in March, an effort it will undertake in loose coordination with ENEMO member Committee of Ukrainian Voters (CVU). Of the 400, Novotny told us that he hopes at least 10 percent will

be long-term observers there for 7 weeks. According to Novotny, SlovakAid, the aid arm of the MFA, has budgeted USD 300,000 for election monitoring in Ukraine and Belarus this year, and his group (through its Slovak member organization, Obcianske Oko or "Civic Eye") will be requesting some of those funds to support its efforts. Novotny expects to head the Ukrainian mission himself, noting that they are focusing less on Belarus because, with Lukashenko on the ballot, the election is already invalid.

HZDS TRIES TO WIN (FOREIGN) HEARTS AND MINDS

16. (C) Poloff met January 17 with Andrea Haskova, the new Assistant to HZDS Foreign Affairs Secretary (and former Foreign Minister under Meciar) Zdenka Kramplova. Haskova, a 25 year old part-time law school student, said she was disappointed with the ruling SDKU party and that she does not like the left-leaning Smer. Haskova is not a member of HZDS and did not seem to have a particular interest in politics, yet her current job finds her making courtesy calls on foreign Embassies to "offer her services" as a liaison with Meciar and the party. Haskova gave us an English-language HZDS brochure, published in 2001, with a glossy cover featuring the EU and NATO emblems, an American and Slovak flag waving side by side, and the HZDS logo. The content of the publication attempts to "re-write" HZDS' past: In the "brief history" of HZDS the flier claims "as soon as the nation gained independence, the HZDS confirmed Slovakia's pro-integration course and ambition to join the European Union and NATO." No mention is made of Meciar's failed bid to thwart NATO accession via a referendum.

SLOVAKIA DONATES MILITARY AID TO AFGHANISTAN

17. (SBU) The Slovak cabinet approved a plan to donate 2,200 tons of excess military materiel -- including pistols, machine guns, RPG launchers, and artillery pieces and ammunition -- to Afghanistan to help the country rebuild its army. Defense Minister Juraj Liska said the value of the donation is SKK 455 million (around USD 14.5 million). Afghanistan will use FMF funds to cover transport costs for the transfer of the materiel.

VALLEE

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